Valerie Adams

For more than a century, track and field has been a central part of New Zealand’s Olympic tradition. From the days of walker Harry Kerr, New Zealanders have excelled in a range of athletics events at the Olympics, but few have dominated their branch of the sport as has shot putter Valerie Adams. At the end of the 2011 season, Adams had won three world titles, two Commonwealth Games gold medals and an Olympic gold medal – all this by the age of 26.Adams was born in Rotorua New Zealand, to a Tongan mother (Lilika Ngauamo) and an English father (Sydney Adams). She showed potential at several sports, because not only was she exceptionally tall and strong, but she was nimble and athletic as well. She met Kirsten Hellier in 1998 and this proved to be a turning point in her life. The pair combined for the next 11½ years until their relationship broke up in 2010. In that time Hellier, a former javelin champion, was Adams’ friend, mentor, adviser and coach. Adams improved exponentially after breaking into the international scene by winning the world youth title at Debrecen, Hungary, in 2001. She really had the athletics world taking notice when she won the much more important world junior title in Kingston, Jamaica, the next year, even though she was just 17 and was competing against shot putters three years older. Shortly after, she took the silver medal at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester. Her potential seemed unlimited. Since then, her career has been one of almost unbroken success. In 2003, when still a junior, she was fifth in the world championships in Paris. At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Adams finished eighth, while still recovering from appendectomy just weeks before. She was unlucky in Athens. After her first three throws in the final she was ninth, so she didn’t qualify for a further three throws. Only later was one of those ahead of her disqualified for a drugs infraction. By then it was too late for Adams to get the extra throws she deserved. The following year, Adams earned a place in the international elite, winning a bronze medal at the World Championships with a personal best throw of 19.87m.At the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games Adams won the Gold medal, breaking the 20-year-old Commonwealth Games record of 19.00m with a throw of 19.66m. She finished the year ranked No 2 in the world and won the Halberg Award as Sportswoman of the Year. From 2007-09 she was the world’s No 1 shot putter. She won the world titles in 2007 and 2009, and in 2008 was a convincing winner of the Olympic gold medal in Beijing, where she stamped her authority early on the field. In 2007, 2008 and 2009 she won the Halberg Award and in 2006 the New Zealand Olympic Committee awarded her the Lonsdale Cup. Adams had a troubled year in 2010, splitting with Hellier and taking on Didier Poppe as coach. Throughout the year she was consistently beaten by Belarusian Nadzeya Ostapchuk. Her marriage to discus thrower Bertrand Vili broke up and she lost her world No 1 ranking. She did, however, retain her Commonwealth Games crown. Into 2011 Adams changed coaches again, this time linking with Jean-Pierre Agger. She struck consistently good form and capped off a great season by retaining her world title, throwing a personal best 21.24m at Daegu, South Korea.

**Results:**

**DELHI 2010 COMMONWEALTH GAMES***ATHLETICS*

Shot Put – Women, Gold

**MELBOURNE 2006 COMMONWEALTH GAMES***ATHLETICS*

Shot Put – Women, Gold

**MANCHESTER 2002 COMMONWEALTH GAMES***ATHLETICS*

Shot Put – Women, Silver

**BEIJING 2008 OLYMPIC SUMMER GAMES***ATHLETICS*

Shot Put – Women, Gold

**ATHENS 2004 OLYMPIC SUMMER GAMES***ATHLETICS*

Shot Put – Women, 8th

At London 2012 she will be one of the few medal contenders to possibly get a medal or grab Gold.

